

Yusuf Dadoo. Some facts of his life.

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1. Yusuf Dadoo, then the SACP Chairman, one of 15 members of the Central Committee and one of 7 members of the Executive had initially opposed (together with Moses Kotane, by the way) the public re-emergence of the Party, and its delayed the implementation of the relevant decision. It was intended at that stage that a draft of the Party Programme would be published in the *African Communist* magazine, which had been launched in 1959 (though its first issues did not mention it was the CPSU publication). However Sharpeville accelerated the process, and in June 1960 the Central Committee managed to convene a meeting and took the decision to go public.

Dadoo was not present there, because he left South Africa at the beginning of April 1960 for Bechuanaland. From there, together with Oliver Tambo, he travelled on Indian documents by charter plane to Tanganyika. Unfortunately the plane had to land in Blantyre in Nyasaland, where the danger of deportation to South Africa was real. But they managed to get permission to go on to Dar es Salaam and later to Accra, where Kwame Nkrumah provided them with Ghanaian travel documents. Soon they moved to London, which, in the words of Dadoo, was 'a very suitable centre from many points of view to operate from'.¹

2. Dadoo was instrumental in launching regular relations between the South African liberation movement and the USSR, when he came to Moscow with Vella Pillay (then the Party's representative in Western Europe) in July 1960.

The spirit of the meeting in July 1960 and of subsequent discussions with the CPSU representatives was later described by Yusuf Dadoo: 'We have open honest discussions as between Communists, and the Soviet comrades have never insisted on this or that line.'² The SACP delegation presented their Soviet counterparts with documents on the 'Political Situation in the Union of South Africa'³ and on 'The Situation in the South African Communist Party',⁴ which described the 'deep crisis' after Sharpeville and gave a self-critical analysis of the actions of the opposition forces. It explained that the party has decided to issue statements, addressed to the workers, in its own name.'

The SACP documents explained that in spite of arrests the Party had continued its activity. Its work was hindered, however, by economic constraints. These were caused by declining donations after the introduction of the State of Emergency (previously,

¹ Mayibuye Centre Historic Papers, Yusuf Dadoo Collection. HP, (Hereafter, MCHP, YDC) (Yusuf Dadoo's autobiographical notes), p. 2.

² MCHP, YDC, E. Pahad, 'Yusuf Dadoo: A Political Biography' (unpublished manuscript), p. 211.

³ Dadoo and Pillay, 'The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa'. 14 July 1960, (Moscow).

⁴ Dadoo and Pillay, 'The Situation in the South African Communist Party'. 14 July 1960, (Moscow).

many contributions had come from the Indian community, in which Yusuf Dadoo was extremely popular and respected), and by additional expenditure on maintaining the families of detainees and assistance to the ANC Emergency Committee.⁵

So, “forms of fraternal assistance from the CPSU and workers’ parties of the Socialist Countries”,⁶ were discussed at the meeting in the International Department of the Central Committee, and \$30 000 were allocated to the SACP in 1960 from the so-called ‘International Trade Union Fund for assistance to left workers’ organisations’.⁷ This fund had been established ten years earlier on the initiative of the Soviet Party to render material assistance to ‘foreign left parties, workers’ and public [non-governmental] organisations, which are subjected to persecution and repression.’⁸

3. Dadoo was instrumental also in involving the USSR and other socialist countries in the international campaign to isolate and boycott South Africa.
4. Dadoo was keen to preserve the unity of the international communist movement. After representing the SACP at the GDR Party Congress in Berlin, he reported to the Central Committee ‘Khrushchev’s plea on behalf of the CC of the CPSU to call a halt to polemic between C. Parties, to stop criticising other parties inside one’s own party and to allow some time for the passions to subside’, but regretted that leaders of the Chinese delegation had not refrained from condemnation of the CPSU.⁹

In June 1969 he was a member of the SACP delegation that participated in the International Communist Meeting in Moscow. Apart from him, the delegation included John Marks, Michael Harmel, and a young activist registered as J. Jabulani (Thabo Mbeki).¹⁰ It is worth mentioning that Dadoo had to leave Moscow earlier because he was ‘wanted by the [ANC] Revolutionary Council’.¹¹

5. Dadoo was based in London for over two decades, sharing a small office with Joe Slovo, which served as a kind of informal headquarters for the SACP. Although he was replaced by John Marks as the SACP Chairman after his departure from South Africa, in reality he headed everyday activities of the Party and did his best to reorganise it in exile. Several meetings of the Central Committee, often annually, were convened in 1960s. The first took place in Prague on 8-9 December 1963 and involved seven of the nine Central Committee members, including the General Secretary and the Chairman. The next meeting was held in Moscow during July 1964.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Russian State Archive of Modern History (hereafter, RSAMH). Head of the CPSU CC International Department B. N. Ponomarev’s report on expenditures of the ‘International Trade Union Fund for Assistance to Left Workers’ Organisations attached to the Romanian Council of Trade Unions’, 2 November 1960.

⁸ RSAMH, Extract from the Minutes of the Politbureau of the AUCP(b) Central Committee, N 76/12, 19 July 1950.

⁹ MCHP, YDC, Mota’s Report, p.2.

¹⁰ MCHP, YDC, List of members of delegations of Communist and Workers Parties, taking part in the work of the Meeting, p. 16.

¹¹ MCHP, YDC, Meeting of the delegation, 4 June 1969, p. 4.

After the death of John Marks in 1972 he was elected the SACP Chairman once again, and because Kotane was sick and remained in a hospital in Moscow, Dadoo till 1979 practically was the top leader of the Party.

When the first Central Committee meeting after Soweto created the new body, Politbureau, Dadoo became one of its five members. All the Party's financial matters became the responsibility of him and Joe Slovo. He also headed the SACP structures in the UK.

The confidential document of Pretoria's National Intelligence Service described him as 'the co-ordinator and brains behind much of the organising against the RSA in Europe'.¹³ And beyond Europe as well, I would said. (Not much, for example, is known about the reasons of him making a pilgrimage to Mecca.)

6. Dadoo maintained brotherly relations with the ANC leadership. Another prominent South African communist, Moses Kotane, described Dadoo much earlier, in 1954, as 'the only non-African who has been accepted as their own leader and brother by the Africans.'¹⁴

The respect paid to him by Oliver Tambo is clear from the very frank message sent by him to Dadoo from Lusaka in May 1968, during fighting in Zimbabwe: "For us here the ground is covered with thick thorny bush and we have to pick our way with meticulous care. This does not facilitate a quick march forward, but we are by no means marking time, much less retreating. In fact, considering the circumstances, we are not doing very badly. The trouble is of course that we are but a chip off a monstrous block which has yet to roll forward, crushing and grinding everything in its path. This is what we are working for."¹⁵

The high respect which many ANC leaders and activists felt for Dadoo was demonstrated by Nelson Mandela in a letter smuggled out by Mac Maharaj in 1976 from the Robben Island Prison: 'I think much of the days to come, the problems of adjustment, picking up old threads. It is mainly in this regard that I never really live on this island. My thoughts are ever travelling up and down the country most of the time and the Oxford Atlas, in spite of its old age, having acquired it in 1963, is one of my greatest companions. In the process I have come to know the world and my country far better than when I was free.

But the purpose of this letter is not to talk about correspondence, past memories or atlases, but to tell you that I don't forget 5/9 [Dadoo's birthday] and to wish you many happy returns; to let you know that we think of you with far more pride that words can express ... We hope that you, 2 Reggies [Oliver Reginald Tambo and Reginald September] and Toni's Pa ['Rusty' Bernstein] are keeping together like quadruplets...

¹² RSAMH, Minutes of the Secretariat, N 103, item 13g, 17 June 1964.

¹³ MCHP, Profile of Mac Maharaj, with emphasis on his friends and family, Pretoria, 1980.

¹⁴ MCHP, Brian Bunting Collection. M. Kotane, 'Meet the Fighters for a New South Africa', p. 2.

¹⁵ MCHP, ANC London Collection (hereafter, MCHP, ANC Lon C), Oliver Tambo to Yusuf Dadoo, 6 May 1968.

(No doubt Mandela meant the four organisations of the Congress Alliance.)

I look forward to seeing you some day. I never forget ties of a personal nature which link you and I and which may help cement the fond memories of 3 decades.”¹⁶

Dadoo was present at the Morogoro conference in 1969 and his notes, preserved in his collection at the Mayibuye Centre archives remain an invaluable document on the proceedings of the conference.

7. Yusuf Dadoo was of course a civilian person, moreover, he was one of those in the SACP leadership who initially were hesitant to turn to the “use of violence”. However, when the time came he together with Moses Kotane, was the first to discuss it in Moscow in October-November 1961.

The Soviets agreed with Kotane and Dadoo’s opinion that ‘under the conditions of the reign of terror by the fascist government which has at its disposal a huge military and police machinery, the peaceful way of reaching the tasks of liberation and revolutionary movements at present are excluded’ and agreed to assist them “in training several military instructors.”¹⁷

In Morogoro Dadoo was elected Vice-Chairman of the newly created Revolutionary Council and remained in this position till its replacement in early 1983 by the Political-Military Council, where he was a member of 5-person Chairmanship.¹⁸ Probably he was responsible mainly for political underground activities, than for a military side of the RC work. But the military matters have been attended as well, for example his notes show that during his visit to Hanoi, he met the Vietnamese Chief of General Staff.

8. However by 1983 he was terminally ill and had to limit his movements. For example, he could not attend an enlarged meeting of the SACP Politbureau in Moscow in May 1983. His condition had been reported to the SACP Secretariat in Maputo in September 1982: he had to undergo an operation for the removal of a cancerous growth, but, unfortunately, the operation did not help.

Dadoo’s medical treatment took place in Czechoslovakia and then in Britain. Only in July 1983, when it was too he came to Moscow. Soviet doctors usually would not inform a patient about a mortal illness such as cancer, but Dadoo himself was a medical doctor and they did not hide the truth from him. I heard from my colleagues that he was upset, just for a moment, but immediately braced himself and started thanking the doctors and nurses for all they had done for him.

Dr Andrey Urnov, who bit him a farewell, describes how a bottle of *Stolichnaya* was

¹⁶ MCHP, ANCLonC, Mandela to Mota [Yusuf Dadoo], 1 November 1975.

¹⁷ RSAMH, Decisions taken by the instruction of the Secretaries of the CPSU Central Committee without recording in the minutes, N 478, 28 November 1961.

¹⁸ MCHP, YDC, Structure March 1983, p. 1.

'smuggled' aboard the Aeroflot plane and the farewell toast was raised in its first class section. By the way, Gill Marcus, newly appointed Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, who happened to be in Moscow at the time, accompanied Dadoo on his way to London.

Dadoo died in London a month later, and Joe Slovo in an article in the *African Communist* described how he 'turned this moment of irreversible defeat into a victory'.¹⁹ His death coincided with the last days of preparation for the SACP Central Committee meeting in Prague, and I had the sad duty of telling Moses Mabhida and his other comrades coming from Africa to Prague via Moscow about Dadoo's death at the Sheremetyevo airport.

There is a letter in his collection at the Mayibuye Centre, meant for his friends in South Africa (it is not clear, whether it was dispatched). It says that in police circles they say 'The great coolie vrek' Dadoo wrote: 'These small minds tout [sic] our people with the question of my dying, in particular the Indian people ... But this should not worry you unduly. None of us is immortal, but the cause for which we live and fight is.'²⁰

Dadoo's testament, in a letter to the Central Committee meeting, published in the *African Communist* deserves to be widely known. In particular, Dadoo quoted from the then Soviet leader Yury Andropov: 'In politics one pays for one's errors. When the guiding role of a Communist Party weakens, there arises the danger of sliding back to a bourgeois-reformist way of development. If a Party loses touch with the people, self-proclaimed aspirants to the role of those who express the interests of the working people emerge in the ensuing vacuum.'²¹ I believe his warning is relevant to South Africa today as well.

¹⁹ *African Communist*, no. 96, (1984), pp. 6-7.

²⁰ MCHP, YDC, (Yusuf Dadoo's letter to his friends in South Africa).

²¹ Y. Dadoo, *South Africa's Freedom Struggle* (London: Kliptown Books, 1990), p. 288.

